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Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support to South Sudan by the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides a review of the major developments in South Sudan since July 2014, with a focus on the continuing impact of the conflict on prospects for development. It includes some key actions taken by the United Nations system and the international community to help the citizens of South Sudan to cope with the disruption to their lives. The parties to the conflict are called upon to end the violence in order to create space for development, including by increasing expenditure on basic social services. The international community is called upon to provide appropriate levels of funding that would allow for people-based or community-based development and to focus on protecting development gains. A central message is the need to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between humanitarian and development support, strengthening the former in the conflict-affected States and the latter in the more stable ones.

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I. Introduction

1. Following the independence of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, the Economic and Social Council expressed great interest, through the adoption of resolution 2011/43, in the extensive humanitarian, peacebuilding and development challenges facing the country. The present report is the fourth on South Sudan submitted to the Council since the country's independence.

2. The first report (E/2012/76) provides an outline of the support of the United Nations system to the Government of South Sudan following independence and the transition from emergency relief to development and building of local capacity. The second report (E/2013/73) provided a description of the support to and implementation of development and peacebuilding frameworks by the United Nations system and the international community. The third report (E/2014/94) depicted the outbreak of conflict on 15 December 2013, which reversed much of the progress made in the first two years after independence and created a set of dire economic, humanitarian, political, social and security crises.

3. The present report provides an outline of the major developments that have occurred since the previous report to the Council. It traces the efforts of the United Nations system to respond to the fluid operating environment, in particular in meeting immediate humanitarian needs, while also exploring the relevance and applicability of resilience and development programming in those locations that have remained relatively stable over the past year.

II. Context

4. The crises created by the outbreak of conflict on 15 December 2013 and the subsequent and repeated failures to reach a peace agreement have not abated in South Sudan. The Sudan People's Liberation Army, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition and affiliated militia groups continued their offensives throughout 2014 and into 2015. Consequently, an estimated 1.5 million people have been internally displaced, more than 135,000 of whom had sought protection at United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) bases across the country as at 2 April 2015; as at 24 April, an additional 525,370 people had fled across borders to Ethiopia, Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda. The issue of concern is not only the high numbers of displaced persons inside and outside the country, but also the fact that many of the most skilled and competent who had returned to the country were the first to leave as a result of the crisis.

5. On 3 March 2015, the Security Council adopted resolution 2206 (2015) in which the Council underscored its willingness to impose targeted sanctions against all parties that continued to obstruct the political process and undermine the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement of 23 January 2014. The Council expressed its deep concern at the repeated failure of the parties to honour their commitments and to engage meaningfully in the peace process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which had not yielded results as at the time of writing. An in-person meeting between the President, Salva Kiir, and Riek Machar notwithstanding, the parties failed to resolve outstanding issues, including power-sharing, by the deadline of 5 March 2015 imposed by IGAD.

6. The political crisis and violence have had a significant impact on the economy of South Sudan, which is at risk of collapse. The reduction of the oil output to half of what was projected for the budget for fiscal year 2015 coupled with the sharp decline in global oil prices and the flat-fee arrangements for oil transport through the Sudan have dramatically affected the country's main source of revenue. The situation is compounded by the burden of loans taken out at the time of the oil shutdown in 2012. Furthermore, government expenditure is directed towards security spending, a sector beset by significant accountability and transparency challenges. Unemployment and the cost of living continue to rise.

7. With revenues collapsing and expenditure directed towards security spending, the budget is running a large deficit, which the central bank finances by printing money. The Government is unable to secure loans because there is no peace agreement. In the absence of a peace agreement and with the outstanding debt, lenders are reluctant to extend loans to the Government. The first signs of escalating inflation are evident in rising urban food prices. The central bank maintains a dual exchange rate system, with the official exchange rate at 3 South Sudanese pounds to the United States dollar, while the market rate is rapidly depreciating, having reached around 9 pounds to the dollar. This leads to massive losses to entities obliged to exchange dollars at the official exchange rate to make payments in national currency. This includes the United Nations, which now incurs costs that are three times higher than would be the case if there were a single exchange rate. The distortion also results in South Sudanese vendors, who are paid in the national currency converted at the official exchange rate in United Nations procurement tenders, being priced out of competition with foreign vendors, who are paid in dollars.

8. While peacebuilding efforts have been under way since the crisis erupted, it must be noted that the conflict has resulted in extensive destruction of physical infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, degradation of natural resources, devastation of human capital, increased violence against journalists and human rights defenders and a deep and lasting erosion of social trust. Markets have been severely distressed, especially in conflict-affected areas, and the prices of food and other essential commodities have significantly increased. An overwhelming number of people have lost their livelihoods. Meanwhile, the people of South Sudan have been subjected to continuing human rights violations and abuses, ethnically targeted violence, sexual and gender-based violence and grave child rights violations, including the recruitment and use of children in armed groups.

9. Any resumption of large-scale fighting will dramatically escalate the already high food insecurity and malnutrition among affected communities. The main planting season lasts from May to July, depending on the area. Tranquillity is needed for the land to be prepared and for the seeds to reach the farmers and be planted. In addition, the conflict has caused large-scale displacement of pastoralists, dramatically increasing the incidence of diseases among livestock, which further threatens food security. The irregular migration of livestock has further exacerbated intercommunal conflicts. All communities, including displaced persons, need access to water, including for livestock, and secure access to agricultural land. Communities close to the front lines are the hardest to reach. For more than a year, internally displaced persons and host communities have been isolated from both markets and humanitarian assistance, except for limited delivery of goods to those communities carried by porters over long distances from the few distribution points or markets. Food stocks are totally depleted; the main sources of food are water

lilies and fish, in addition to a little milk for those who still have livestock. The need for cereals and cooking oil is acute and will become worse as the lean season unfolds. The United Nations and its partners aim to support 2.8 million persons during the coming three months through distribution of emergency kits, mainly crop kits for the planting season. Furthermore, millions of cattle, sheep and goats will receive veterinary support and vaccines.

10. Continued large-scale fighting coupled with expected heavy rains and flooding will also have a heavy impact on nutrition and health service delivery. Limited access to safe water, lack of proper sanitation and inappropriate hygiene for infants and young children, as well as poor feeding and care practices, will contribute to the already low nutrition status in the conflict-affected areas. The current malnutrition situation remains above the World Health Organization emergency threshold of 15 per cent and is expected to deteriorate as the heavy rains return. A total of 55,000 cartons of therapeutic food have already been pre-positioned for nutrition service providers to ensure therapeutic feeding coverage during the rainy season; however, the rapid response modality will remain essential in mitigating the suffering in some of the hard-to-reach areas if access is further constrained.

III. Impact of the conflict on development

11. The United Nations system faced dilemmas and challenges in 2014. Much of the international assistance to development was frozen or reprogrammed from development to humanitarian assistance, given the overwhelming depth and scale of the humanitarian consequences of the crisis and donors' insistence on channelling funds primarily towards meeting urgent humanitarian needs. The United Nations system also responded by undertaking a programme criticality exercise to guide the prioritization of programming according to the levels of conflict and revised the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The Framework for 2014-2016 now includes two additional areas of work: early recovery and durable solutions for displaced persons. This was done not only to enable United Nations development agencies to respond to emerging needs, but also to encourage humanitarian actors to incorporate longer-term development objectives into the delivery of humanitarian programming.

12. Education and health indicators in South Sudan, already among the lowest in the world, have further deteriorated owing to the protracted conflict. Only 27 per cent of the population is literate and the net primary enrolment ratio is 41 per cent, with less than one tenth of the entering students completing eighth grade. Less than 1 per cent of the population has post-secondary education. A further 400,000 children have been forced out of school in the conflict-affected states. It is therefore critical to ensure sustained provision of basic education (literacy, numeracy and life skills) through humanitarian efforts in conflict-affected areas and, at the same time, coordinate sector development support to maintain service delivery in less-affected areas. Infant mortality is 105 per 1,000 births, while the maternal mortality rate is 2,054 per 100,000 births, the highest in the world. Only 44 per cent of households live within 5 km of a health care facility. Malnutrition is severe, especially among children. In view of the foregoing, provision of emergency health services must be complemented by support to strengthen health systems at the national, state, county and community levels.

13. In 2015, the United Nations will continue to strike a balance in programming between humanitarian action and development yielding sustainable results. Specifically, United Nations action in South Sudan will focus on the key sectors of maternal health, education and food security.

IV. United Nations support to South Sudan

14. Throughout 2014, in line with the prevailing situation on the ground, the humanitarian aid operation was central to United Nations activities in South Sudan. Following the initial, rapid onset of conflict, aid agencies swiftly moved to scale up their presence throughout the country, in particular in hard-to-reach areas in the three states worst affected by violence, Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile. By adopting flexible and innovative approaches to the challenging environment, aid agencies were able to reach 3.6 million people with life-saving assistance. A major food and livelihoods response helped to avert a famine, reaching more than 2.3 million people with emergency food assistance and 4.8 million people with livelihood support.

15. Efforts by partners in the health, water, sanitation and hygiene sectors have curtailed a large-scale outbreak of cholera that threatened the lives and health of tens of thousands of people. The services were provided to save the lives of thousands of pregnant women had a positive impact on maternal mortality, a critical area given that South Sudan has the world's highest maternal mortality ratio. In addition, the security situation has fostered new modes of collaboration between humanitarians and other organizations. More than 117,000 people have continued to seek refuge inside UNMISS bases and aid agencies have coordinated closely with UNMISS to provide assistance and protection. Joint planning processes between UNMISS and United Nations agencies have been conducted, both at the policy and the operational levels, contributing to enhanced operational coordination and programmatic coherence. A similar, successful operation is under way in Pibor, where the Government, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are supporting the release and reintegration of 1,757 children formerly associated with the Cobra Faction, with further releases expected in the coming weeks.

16. The enormous difficulties notwithstanding, consistent efforts have been made in the development field, even though progress has been limited owing to funding constraints and the politically challenging operating environment in the country. The United Nations has contributed to the formulation by international development partners of principles for operating in South Sudan in the current context, as well as to discussions on improving the linkages between political, humanitarian and development support. The outcomes of the discussions resulted in joint donor position papers on five key themes: basic services, economic governance, reconciliation, security sector reform and political processes and governance. They will help to inform donors' engagement if and when a transitional government is put in place.

V. Prospects and recommendations

17. It does not appear that the political will currently exists to meet the commitments made under the IGAD-led mediation and security issues continue overwhelmingly to dominate the national policy agenda. As long as this situation

continues, there will be little fiscal space for locally driven development, or even for basic service delivery. It is evident that fewer resources are being allocated for development than for the security sector, which constrains the Government's ability to deliver basic social services to its citizens. The balance between security and development needs to be reversed urgently, given that South Sudan faces one of the worst global outlooks in terms of human development indicators. Urgent action by the international community is required to push for both a resolution of the conflict and a rebalancing of budgetary priorities. The immediate challenge is to urge the parties to the conflict to take bold steps towards a peace agreement and to turn that into a space that allows for reconciliation, the building of confidence among the people of South Sudan and sustainable peace.

18. The United Nations will continue to support the people and communities of South Sudan to reduce the risk of a widening conflict and, indeed, to search for the sustainable solutions at the community level that the South Sudanese people hoped for following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Sudan in 2005 and the country's independence in 2011. South Sudan represents one of the largest State-building and nation-building challenges currently facing the United Nations system. The country's wealth was expected to benefit the population equitably and to reverse the legacy of warfare, underdevelopment and marginalization, but those aspirations have been significantly curtailed. Delivery systems across all sectors remain fragile at best and more often dysfunctional. Corruption affects many levels of government, while accountability mechanisms, where they exist, have failed to deter the misuse and mismanagement of public resources, in particular public oil revenues. There are pertinent concerns about ensuring macroeconomic stability, inclusive growth and employment, as well as about deepening ethnic cleavages. Although oil production remains the cornerstone of the country's economy, diversification of the economy is needed to reduce the extreme dependence on oil and environmental considerations need to be incorporated into sustainable development planning. In the short term, however, prospects for renewed development throughout South Sudan appear to be severely limited, especially because there are currently few specific signs of an end to the conflict.

19. Nevertheless, there are clear areas in which the United Nations can focus on development, even in the midst of conflict; these are, most notably, agriculture, education and health. Programming in such areas can be people-based or community-based and is certainly pro-poor. It is undeniable that fostering future generations of South Sudanese who are well nourished, healthy and educated is a precondition for sustainable development and for the effective rule of law, whereby all are equal before the law and are able to demand that their rights be upheld. At the same time, the United Nations system in South Sudan is of the view that more than humanitarian aid is needed and that the issue of displacement both inside and outside South Sudan must be tackled. A return to normal life for the almost 2 million displaced persons, the overwhelming majority of whom are women and children, could enhance recovery, which will be important to lasting peace. The urgency of ensuring that students do not miss yet another year of education and the need to pay closer attention to sustainable development in more stable states cannot be underestimated. The current conflict calls for balancing humanitarian and development needs against the realities of different states; operating in such a way will be an appropriate response to both the fluid situation in the conflict-affected

states and the relatively stable situation in the rest of the country. The three most conflict-affected states would require humanitarian aid-based approaches to meet the basic needs of the displaced, the vulnerable and those affected by violence, as may fragile states such as Warrap and Lakes, which are becoming increasingly affected. The rest of the country will require support in protecting development gains, extending sustainable assistance to vulnerable groups by supporting livelihoods and ensuring the delivery of basic services, primarily education and health.

20. To meet the challenges of 2015 and beyond, a critical mass of issues, notably peace and reconciliation and humanitarian action and development, will need to be addressed simultaneously. Clear benchmarks will help to guide the parallel tracks of humanitarian action and development. In addition, leveraging various funding streams to address short-term and long-term development needs and assessing the viability of flexible financing models will be required. Over the past year, the challenges faced by the United Nations in South Sudan have been immense. The Organization has experienced significant setbacks and had to operate in an environment characterized predominantly by emergency response. However, the determination and commitment of the United Nations system to simultaneously addressing the enormous humanitarian needs facing the country while promoting the longer-term development agenda will continue in 2015, in recognition of the fact that, even though a peace agreement may have been signed, it will take a long time to repair the damage done to the fabric of South Sudanese society. There is no alternative to an inclusive, politically negotiated peace process. The South Sudanese need peace, and need it now.